
Michael Harrington, In This Club, It's Just Not Sporting

By Judy Bachrach

Mike Harrington has broken the rules.

House members will tell you (not for attribution, of course) that others, too, break the rules. That some of them have, for instance, revealed secret information; that the Pentagon does the same thing whenever it suits the Pentagon. That they go to briefings labeled "secret," having read about them in the papers three days before.

House members will tell you that you can get away with an awful lot. But Mike Harrington did not. Michael J. Harrington, Democrat from Massachusetts, read secret testimony and imparted the substance of it, or some of the substance of it, to a number of people, and it looks like he's not getting away with much. Sometime later this month the House Ethics Committee will be examining a formal complaint brought against him by one of his colleagues. It is a precedent. No member has ever brought a formal complaint against another since the Ethics Committee started functioning in 1968. Congress, as we all know, is a club and that isn't sporting.

But Harrington isn't known as a club man.

Pat Schroeder, a Colorado Democrat who is on the House Armed Services Committee from whence all these problems flow, says this:

"It (Congress) is sort of a club and anyone who criticizes it they kind of take personally..."

And she says this:

"Mike Harrington's a good person and I hate to see him pushed around, sacrificed... It's like they wanted blood..."

There are three main reasons for the ruckus and only one of them has to do with the nature of what Harrington read. The rest have to do with the

nature of Harrington himself. In June, '74, Mike Harrington read secret testimony on United States involvement in Chile. The testimony had been delivered by CIA head William Colby before the House Armed Services subcommittee on CIA oversight. In subsequent letters to a senator and a congressman Mike Harrington wrote, in effect, that the CIA had spent \$11 million towards making Chile unsafe for its late President, Salvador Allende.

After signing a piece of paper promising not to "release" the testimony to any unauthorized person, Harrington confided not only in the senator and congressman, but in some other colleagues, a number of his staffers, an aide to Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) and—in much vaguer terms—a Washington Post reporter who was asked not to print it. The reporter complied, later pointing out that Harrington hadn't given him hard news anyway—nothing contained in the famous letters.

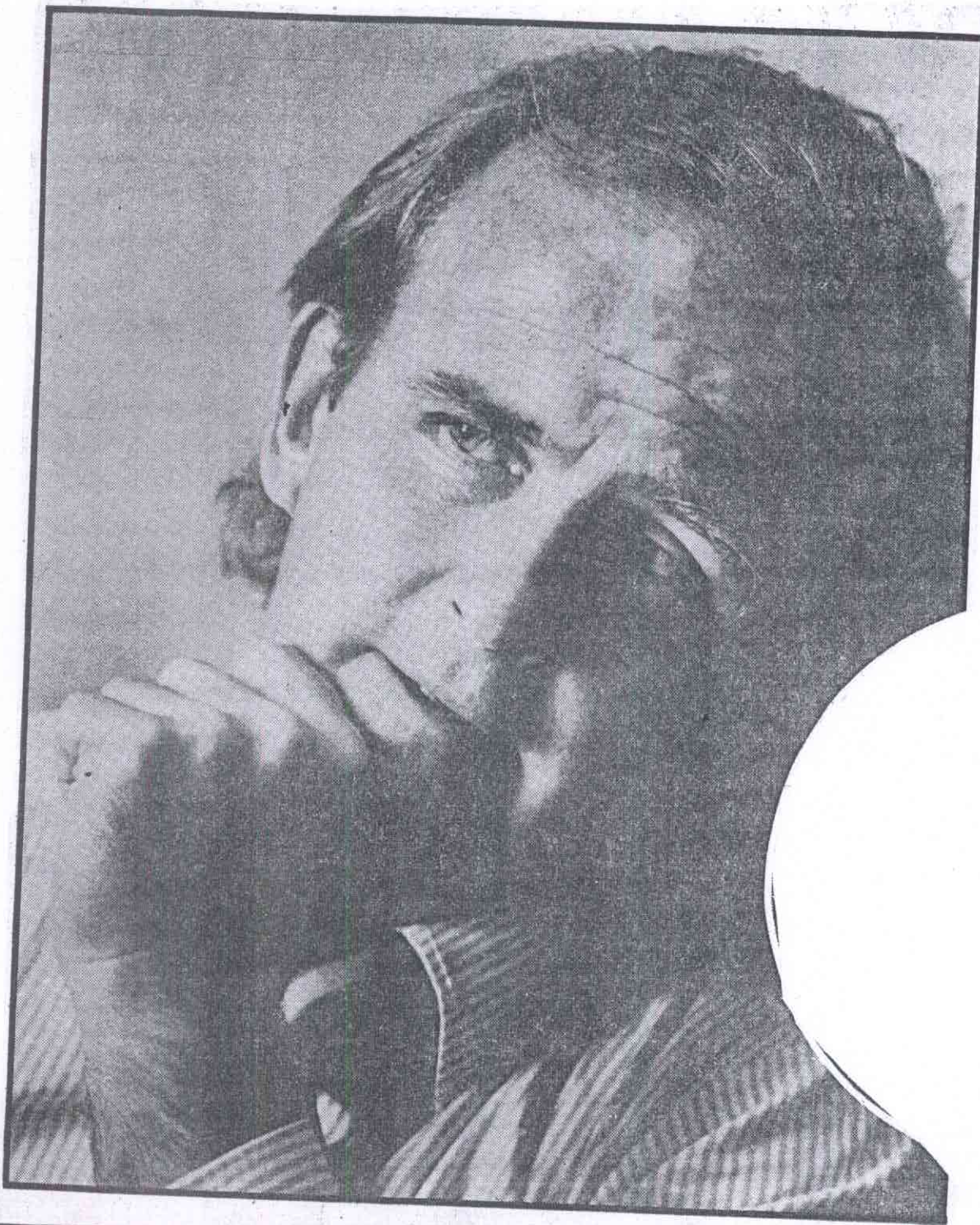
Ask Mike Harrington why he signed a secrecy pledge in the first place and he'll reply nonchalantly, "Why? Because that was a condition of reading the testimony."

When in September two newspapers simultaneously revealed the substance of Harrington's letters, the Massachusetts congressman was called before the Armed Services' special subcommittee on intelligence. Harrington told his questioners he had not leaked the letters to the press, but acknowledged having discussed the CIA testimony with other people.

Ask Mike Harrington why, if he wasn't responsible for the big leak, did he admit to minor confidences that apparently led to nothing—and he'll reply, "I didn't want to beat the rap. The best approach is: Tell the story. Level with 'em."

But the "best approach" angered a

See HARRINGTON, G16, Col. 1



The Washington Post

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*"Being in Washington
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Photo by James K. W. Atherton
—The Washington Post



HARRINGTON, From G1

number of Armed Services members. This past spring Harrington sent around a "Dear Colleague" letter suggesting his fellow members avail themselves of the secret Colby testimony, an option that Armed Services evidently seemed to resent. Last June the committee voted to deny him any further secret material until the Ethics Committee examined the whole question of access to its secret files by non-members. Just recently Harrington, himself, filed a complaint before Ethics against all the people who refused him access.

And so, it may be said without exaggeration, that there are congressmen who do not feel tenderly toward Mike Harrington these days.

And yet he doesn't look in the least like an inspiration to outrage.

He is basically a quiet man, a man who does not socialize, does not go to parties in a big way, does not flirt, pal around or allow the smallest portion of his character to burrow into the gentle comforts of Washington and nestle there. He is a man so utterly distracted that he mixes up the names of his own staffers, having on at least one occasion called a female aide "Stanley."

For six years he has been something of a stranger in this town. And that's the way he wants to keep it.

A liberal House Democrat will tell you, "In our gang Mike is hard to work with. He's a loner . . . He's very serious, always interested in business, and that doesn't endear him to the rest of us. I mean he doesn't go to the gym with the rest of us." For this, the congressman implies, Mike Harrington is now paying. For this and for having signed "a silly little slip of paper."

"Mike's problem," concludes the Democrat, "is that he doesn't have enough friends."

Mike Harrington's problem, says House Majority Leader Tip O'Neill, who likes him well, is that he broke the rules. "You don't break the rules of the House," says O'Neill. "You try to change 'em."

Mike Harrington's problem, says someone close to the Armed Services Committee, is that he has done something "dishonorable" by renegeing on his word. And if you do renege, he adds, you should do it "publicly, on the House floor."

And as for Mike Harrington, well, he feels he has a problem too, and in one way he agrees with that particular critic. Mike Harrington says he never got a chance to announce the CIA revelations on the floor of the House, although he was seriously considering that cause of action. But he delayed the announcement all through the summer of '74—and by then it was

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too late. By then the newspapers did it for him.

"I'd like to believe," he says quietly, "that I would have had the courage to do it on the House floor. That I wouldn't have done it indirectly. I don't believe in indirection."

He pauses, a slight pallid man with the mildest of faces, and then says flatly: "I paid the penalty for vacillation."

Never, says Mike Harrington, never did he expect to read such explicit testimony from William Colby. That was one reason he pledged secrecy so blithely. He thought the former CIA head would talk about "economic warfare, the cutback of short-term loans, putting the guy (Allende) on the ropes who was his own worst enemy, anyway."

Instead he discovered that Colby had detailed what Harrington calls "our own mischief in the Chilean context."

"Here you have (Chile), a country of nine million with a history of democratic process. And when you look at where that country is today . . ." Harrington shakes his head, then shrugs.

And there was one other problem: that the public utterances of administration officials about U.S. involvement in Chile were distinctly at variance with Colby's secret testimony.

There are, however, on the Armed Services Committee a number of people who think that when you sign one of their rules you ought to abide by it. Three months ago, after that committee voted by a slim margin to keep its secret files from Harrington (a vote taken after the word "treason" resounded in debate), Robin L. Beard (R-Tenn.) asked the House Ethics Committee to look into Harrington's conduct. Now there are some in Congress (Harrington among them) who feel that since House rules allow any member to see any committee files, Armed Services had no right to exclude Harrington.

No one thinks Mike Harrington will be drawn and quartered, but there are those who worry some over the composition of the Ethics Committee. The Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, as it is officially called, was prompted by the Adam Clayton Powell affair to be determinedly bi-

partisan (6 Democrats; 6 Republicans) and therefore theoretically non-partisan.

It just so happens that the Ethics Committee contains five people who serve on the Armed Services Committee as well. Harrington is formally asking for their disqualification in his case.

Mike Harrington's father, the late Joseph B. Harrington, was and was not like his eldest son. For one thing, he was not a loner. He, probably, would have gone to the House gym.

"Joe Harrington," says Tip O'Neill, who was his very good friend, "was a great orator. One of the great storytellers of all-time. That's not Michael. Joe was extremely affable and a mixer. Mike is not. When I first ran for Congress Joe was one of my speech writers . . ."

Joe Harrington was also a municipal court judge, a state legislator and mayor of Salem, Mass., which is where his four sons grew up.

What his father was not—although he tried to be—was a congressman. He was an American Firster, a cause that did not stand him in good stead when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

To his eldest son, the studious son, the son who kept mostly to himself, Joe Harrington imparted two things: a passion for politics and a reluctance to intervene or be intervened upon.

"My father," says Michael Harrington, "was better than I was in some ways." The father, unlike the son, struggled up from virtually nothing. "We had different styles, different roles. But I want to be me. That's about all I can offer in this business. And maybe that's what being a generational beneficiary is all about. It frees you to do what you want."

It frees you to excel, unencumbered by financial worries, for instance. Frees you to become class president in high school; to attend Harvard; to make the valedictory speech. His brother, Peter, who "enjoyed living" and finds politics "just turns you off" marveled at such industry.

"If anything," says Mike Harrington, "I probably worked too seriously."

He is, in fact, an enormously serious man with a low serious voice, and serious speech patterns so convoluted that note-taking becomes a Rosetta-Stone enterprise. He has small impassive eyes, a *retroussé* nose and thin lips that broaden infrequently into a smile so shy, so devoid of sensuality that he looks most often like Mr.



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Smith newly come to Washington. And yet there is nothing new about Mike Harrington. He is 39 but his political obsessions go as far back as Harvard Law School when, as a student, he ran for and became a member of the Salem City Council. It was what he calls "a diversionary interest" because he loathed Harvard law for its "grinding emphasis on property values as opposed to human values."

The law school period was notable for another event. In 1959, Harrington married his high school sweetheart, an extrovert, a person who knows very well how to laugh at him, a woman named Dorothy. Harrington breaks into one of his rare smiles when he speaks of her. "She tolerates me. She's the best politician in the family." But when in Washington he lives without her or their five children, in a Georgetown house once occupied by Mary Jo Kopechne, among others. But—and he's figured this out—on the average he spends no more than two nights a week here.

He says he's been criticized for not spending more time in Washington, but then he harbors no great passion for the place, and this is why he keeps his family in Beverly, Mass. He is the quintessential New Englander, dry and uncompromising, and for all his Irish Catholic roots, he has been Calvinized and galvanized by Massachusetts.

"Being in Washington hardens you," he'll say. It's the Pullman Car Company of the 20th Century and I want to be able to walk away from it. I don't think Washington is part of reality."

Reality being, of course, anything one chooses to accept and hold true. Michael Harrington, who has never accepted Washington the way it is or Congress the way it is, has nonetheless steadily been interrelating with these fantasies since 1969.

And yet—it is true—there is a portion of him untouched and unhardened by any of it. There is something almost vulnerable in his isolation, something that prompted one of his staffers to say, after she'd announced her resignation: "I feel like I just shot Bambi." But that vulnerability is neither total nor overriding. Mike Harrington is, as he says, "aggressive." And Mike Harrington is, as he also says, unwilling to grow old in Congress.

"It is now 3:50 p.m.," says one Senate aide. "If Teddy Kennedy said he was running for President right this minute, by 3:51 Mike Harrington would announce he's running for the Senate."

He came as something of a surprise.

At the age of 33 after some years as a state legislator, he emerged as the first Democrat since 1875 to be elected congressman from Massachusetts' 6th District. His maiden speech, which concerned itself with the flaws in the seniority system, failed to charm a lot of his colleagues.

But Mike Harrington was not out to charm. He was out, say his critics, to get his name in the papers. He was out, says his admirers, to fight against all the vicissitudes of government that prompted his outrage. Vietnam. Defense spending. Judge Carswell. Richard Nixon and his advisors.

Harrington developed a reputation for getting his way. In late 1970, for instance, he decided he wanted to be on the Armed Services Committee. A number of oldtimers didn't quite feel the two would make the love match of the century. But Harrington got on and proceeded to make life somewhat less comfortable for his fellow committee members.

"The requisite equipment that should come with service on the committee is a bucket of whitewash and a brush," he informed his colleagues in 1972. Chairman F. Edward Hebert, then the chairman, disapproving of such phraseology, added a little of his own:

"This is in no way personal or anything, but you seem very uncomfortable on the committee. Remember, you came on this committee as a supplicant, pleading, crying, begging to get on it. And any day you don't like the way the committee is run or it makes you uncomfortable here, you have the same privilege of leaving the committee..."

But Harrington told people, "I think

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it's good for a snooty easterner to get on the Committee..." and stayed to vote against many things some of his fellow members held dear. To subtract millions from the C-5A project, from the antiballistics missile system. Perhaps he was out to influence people but he wasn't making a whole lot

of friends.

These days Harrington no longer serves on the Armed Services Committee; he's on the Foreign Affairs Committee—his own choice. But also he no longer serves on a select committee, formed last February to investigate the CIA—and that is not by choice. This past summer that committee was reformed and reconstituted, and two people who once were on it, now no longer are. One was its former chairman, Lucien Nedzi, who had heard the secret CIA testimony and not revealed it. The other was Mike Harrington who had revealed it. "I think the contract's out on Harrington," said Ron Dellums around that time.

Everyone you talk to has an idea of what Michael Harrington should or should not have done, should or should not be, what they would do in his place.

"I never look at the intelligence stuff because it's not my business," says an Armed Services Committee person who criticizes Harrington. "Sure, I'm curious. But they discourage that sort of thing. The intelligence establishment discourages you. There's no point in going into a lot of information you're not concerned with. There's no point in spreading it around."

Harrington, though, insisted on reading the Chilean testimony and did so twice—to improve his memory. Then he went to some of his fellow members on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and said, "Look. This is the testimony. I don't want to get into a sensational fuss. But nobody would hold a hearing for me."

And so, on July 18, he wrote identical letters to House Foreign Affairs chairman Thomas E. Morgan, and Senator William Fulbright appealing for further investigation of the CIA's role in the Chilean coup that ended in Allende's death.

Dissatisfied with Fulbright's advice to create a Joint Oversight Committee and with Morgan ("He just hunkers

down and retreats into the snow"), Harrington thought about going before the House floor with his CIA revelations. But it was the summer of impeachment and resignation, the summer few people would have wrested their attention from a departing President to hear about a distant country in Latin America. By September, when the press got wind of his letter to Morgan, the Armed Services Special Subcommittee on Intelligence decided to ask Harrington how the media got so knowledgeable.

Not through him, Harrington as-

sured them, and then went on to list all the people he'd taken into his confidence—one of them the reporter whom he said he'd turned to simply as a friend, for advice. In confidence.

This did not reassure some of his colleagues at all. Rep. Bob Wilson, (R-Calif.), invoked the memory of Benedict Arnold several times: "... I think you really damaged this country tremendously by violating a rule

of the House. You don't think so, but I do. I am sure Benedict Arnold didn't think so either."

There are those more charitable in their analogies, but a good number of people feel Harrington did something wrong.

Tip O'Neill says with some show of impatience, "I admire and respect Mike and his actions. But I do not condone the way he did it." O'Neill says this neither in sorrow nor in anger. He says this as one who, according to Harrington, "has been over the side for me so often his suit is damp."

He says this as one who has made his peace with Congress.

Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn had a saying he was fond of passing along to freshmen:

"To get along you got to go along."

Wes Barthelmes, a Senate aide who is also partial to that saying adds, "Harrington doesn't play the game. Ya gotta be regular."

But the Hill has changed over the years. Not radically. Not extravagantly. But it has altered—sometimes in ways so subtle they can't be measured. Ten years ago the CIA found a gentler audience on the Hill.

Since we're near the Bicentennial year, it is perhaps inevitable that an irregular among regulars should be compared to Revolutionary War prototypes—and not only Benedict Arnold. Don Riegle, a Michigan Democrat, sees Harrington "heaving a chest of tea over the harbor..."

But it all falls short. Mike Harrington, for all that he is ruled by his convictions, simply isn't the stuff of which heroes or ogres or martyrs are made.

Perhaps because the one thing the legislature does well is slowly efface the individual excesses of its cluttered membership. For who remembers the occasional spectacular action of a representative after the passing of one month, six months? Mention Michael Harrington and you still get all sorts of people confusing him with the famous New York Socialist, whose mail the Congressman sometimes gets.

And so the rest of the regulars will continue doing the things they've been doing; and Michael Harrington will go his own way in his own style. Or lack of it.

"I think it's the only part of this business I do well," he says. "I mean comparatively well. I'm sort of the Democratic counterpart to Jerry Ford."

He stops, momentarily amused and chagrined by the analogy. "And that's where it ends. I can see I may be stuck with that comparison forever."

The tenuous smile self-destructs. Harrington continues solemnly. "The one thing that is given me is I'm going to be me. Not you. Not anyone. And I'm very comfortable being me."